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CIA Chief: Laws Needed To Protect Spy Sources

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New legislation is necessary to ensure the confidentiality of American spy sources if the Central Intelligence Agency is to discharge effectively its intelligence duties in the "precarious decade of the 1980s," said CIA Director Stansfield Turner.

Turner, addressing a Denver audience Friday, said if the United States is to retain any confidence in its ability to guide foreign policy based on information surreptitiously gathered in other countries, the CIA must be able to guarantee the sources of the information will be kept secret.

The importance of effective intelligence is more crucial today than it has been in the past, because the "Russians have infinite aggressive intentions" and for the first time are equals of the United States in strategic and conventional military strength, Turner said.

Turner, who has headed the CIA for the past 3½ years, made his remarks before an audience of about 400 jurists and lawyers gathered at the Brown Palace Hotel for the concluding day of the annual 10th Circuit Judicial Conference.

He spoke on behalf of proposals before the Congress that he said would give the CIA the necessary ability to guarantee confidentiality to its sources while simultaneously protecting Americans from CIA excesses that in the past had resulted in violations of constitutional rights.

Those excesses — which prompted congressional investigations in the early 1970s that resulted in legislation some believe has hindered the CIA's effectiveness — have been curbed, said Turner. But he intimated that legislative overkill in the aftermath of the congressional investigations threatens U.S. security if new laws aren't adopted.

Turner said he favored proposals now before Congress that would:

—Reduce from eight to two the number of congressional committees that have to be informed whenever the CIA decides to embark on a "covert action" — an operation in which the CIA secretly tries to manipulate events without participants in those events being aware of CIA intervention.



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ADM. TURNER

"There is a proper place for a limited amount of covert action in our diplomatic portfolio," Turner said. But the likelihood that the CIA can elicit necessary cooperation in covert actions from sympathizers in foreign countries is reduced substantially when these potential allies know some 200 members of Congress will be apprised of the CIA's every move.

—Exempt CIA sources of information from mandatory disclosure sought under the federal Freedom of Information Act. Under the act, anyone, including agents of the Russian KGB, sometimes can require the government to provide information that can lead to the identities of CIA operatives, Turner said. "Our agents need reassurance that they are specifically exempt from the Freedom of Information Act," he said.

—Permit, in some circumstances, criminal penalties to be assessed against persons who disclose the names of CIA operatives abroad. According to Turner, disclosures by such disaffected CIA agents as Phillip Agee have endangered CIA agents and, in one case, led to the assassination of the CIA's chief operative in Greece.

—Install new procedures governing when the CIA would be required to disclose classified information to defense attorneys in criminal cases. In the recent past, the government has elected to dismiss charges lodged against defendants rather than abide by court orders to disclose sensitive intelligence information, Turner said.